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Adolescence in Modern Irish History, Studies in the History of Childhood
Catherine Cox and Susannah Riordan (eds), Basingstoke, Palgrave
Macmillan, 2015, £60.00, pp. xii + 229 ISBN 978-0-230-37490-5

In 1965, some boys in their later teens were causing trouble at Agnes Boys Club in Crumlin. Many had already been barred from dance halls and picture houses, and now, they were proving disruptive at the boys club set up to accommodate them. When the club leader reported the abuses to the police, a 'large gang' was organized from Crumlin and Dolphin's Barn, with the purpose of 'declar[ing] war' on the club and all the church property in Crumlin. He promptly withdrew the charges (p. 191). This anecdote, from Carole Holohan's essay on Catholic youth clubs in the 1960s, is revealing of previously unwritten histories of youthful rebellion in Ireland, seemingly divorced from national or political concerns. It is also indicative of many of the themes in the study of adolescence which this edited collection explores: ideas of delinquency and control, the extent to which adolescence is a distinct phase of life, and the relationship between youth and new forms of consumption and leisure.

Whereas the history of childhood has been a growing field of study in Irish history, the phase of life known as adolescence has been much more overlooked. Adolescence and the related word teenager are highly contested terms, originating from psychology and marketing respectively, with their very utility in a poor and rural society like Ireland still open to question. Similarly, ideas of juvenile delinquency, which have had a determining impact on the field, have been grounded in notions of urbanity and have tended to elide rural narratives of adolescence, which are crucial to understanding the Irish experience. As such, this edited collection seeks to address histories of adolescence in Ireland on its own terms. To do so, the editors use this edited volume to explore two issues: firstly, whether we can speak of adolescence in Ireland as a distinct phase of life, and secondly, the extent to which the history of Irish youth contrasts with other European nation states. As the first edited collection to address the field of adolescence, this edited collection makes an important contribution to the social history of Ireland, defining the field, posing research questions, and producing a

range of informative case studies relating to the nature of modern Irish youth culture.

The nine essays which comprise the critical mass of the collection cover a range of case studies relating to the history of adolescence from the early nineteenth century to the present day. Ann Daly studies medical ideas about young women in later twentieth century Ireland, showing how these idea emanated from a middle class seeking to distance itself from the poverty of the famine years. Conor Reidy explores the history of Ireland's first and only borstal, which opened in 1906 in Clonmel, with a particular focus on the types of young men who spent time in this institution. Susannah Riordan explores concerns around protection of young women from sexual exploitation during the early years of the Free State. Carole Holohan examines the opening of youth clubs during the 1950s and 1960s as an attempt by the Catholic hierarchy to staunch the erosion of religious observance and the social order. Taken together, these essays display the heterogeneity of adolescent experience in Ireland, with broad distinctions based on class, gender, and place.

The earlier half of the collection are notable for their interdisciplinary nature and use of a wide variety of literary and personal sources. In particular, Jonathan Jeffrey Wright uses letters to reconstruct intimate relationships in early nineteenth-century Belfast, while Sandra McAvoy uses the novels of L. T. Meade to examine Victorian constructions of the 'wild Irish girl.' However, towards the latter part of the collection, the nature of the source base seems to narrow, focusing in particular on the reports of the commissions that examined problems of Irish youth and the many anthropological surveys conducted on the island during the mid twentieth century. Due to the large amount of paper work generated by the Catholic Church and affiliated charitable bodies, and inversely, the relative paucity of sources generated by adolescents which makes it into archives, Irish young people can appear in the pages as a cipher for a range of social and moral panics emanating from Ireland's elite. This produces a range of useful and illuminating material regarding the anxieties of the new states. However, these anxieties also prompt curiosities and questions relating the

people behind these moral panics. Over the course of the essays, glimmers of the individuality of Ireland's young people sometimes emerge; indeed, the collection reveals how much work there is still to be done to excavate historical experiences of youth in Ireland.

This edited collection provides a significant introduction to the social history of adolescence. Indeed, both the introduction and final chapter, by Mary Daly, do important work in setting up the nature of Irish youth and the extent to which experiences were constituted by Irish social and economic structures. The crucial link between adolescence, consumption, and leisure meant that many young Irish people, in particular those working on family farms without independent sources of income, always found the pleasures of youth compromised, experiencing instead, 'either an accelerated introduction to adult responsibilities or an accelerated period of infantilizing dependency' (p. 6). Moreover, the collection also highlights the tendency towards the pathologization of the problems of adolescence in Ireland, the focus on youth—and in particular youthful sexualities—as the locus of many anxieties around independence, and the frequent impulse towards institutional solutions to the perceived problems of youth. As such it shows the way in which turning our focus to adolescence can add to existing aspects of Irish history and open up new topics for research.

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